



HOW TO... Break the rules

Digital-imaging maverick **Mike Bedford** is one rebel who does have a cause: he wants to encourage you to flout the rules of image making sometimes so that you can create beautiful, unique photographs

The rules of photography – don't shoot into the sun, keep your camera still, get the exposure right – exist to give you the best chance of capturing a powerful image. They'll give you results that are technically correct. But is that always what you want? Rules are sometimes there to be broken, and if you are prepared to do so you can often get more interesting results. Your attempts might fail, but one of the joys of digital photography is that your failures don't cost anything in film and processing. If the rebel in you is yearning for expression, here's how to break the rules and get away with it.

EXPOSURE CONTROL

Most digital cameras have a way of overriding the normal exposure. This is used if you're photographing a subject with a very light background such as snow or a very dark background such as a window at night. Both of these confuse a camera's metering system, because it expects a mid-tonal range for the background. But this isn't really under- or overexposing the shot; it's more about preventing your camera exposing it incorrectly. If you genuinely underexpose a shot it will appear darker than expected and if you overexpose it the shot will appear too light. Often that would be a mistake, but these effects can be used to create great results.

Underexposure is especially common and a small amount will make colours look more vibrant. More extreme underexposure can render a scene as silhouettes. Overexposure makes colours look washed out, which may not sound great, but the effect can be reminiscent of a watercolour painting.

On a practical note, many cameras allow you to under- or overexpose by a small amount with the automatic, aperture priority or shutter speed priority modes. But if you want to deviate from the correct exposure by more than a couple of stops you'll have to use the manual exposure mode.

FOCUS AND BLUR

One of the golden rules of photography is to ensure that the image is pin-sharp. But blur caused by camera or subject movement can produce some fascinating results. Even an out-of-focus shot can work occasionally. If you want a shot to appear blurred, choose a slow shutter speed using your camera's shutter speed priority mode. You'll learn from trial and error just how slow you need to go for a particular effect.

If you shoot out of the window of a moving car, the landscape will appear blurred and streaked, like an oil painting. Alternatively, follow a moving object with the camera while you're taking the photograph. If you pan it correctly the object will be sharp but the background streaked. Sports photographers often use this trick to emphasise speed when they're photographing racing cars.

It's common to render part of a photograph – either the foreground or the background – out of focus by using a small depth of field, but the aim here is to emphasise the parts of the photograph that are in focus. To achieve this, switch to aperture priority and increase the aperture setting. Making the entire photograph out of focus is more extreme, but it can be effective in abstract photography. If you do want your photograph to be out of focus

you'll have to use manual focusing, if it's available, instead of the usual automatic focusing.

SUN STROKE

We are often told not to shoot into the sun. There are a couple of reasons for this rule that apply to any camera. First, if you get the sun in shot it confuses the camera's metering and your shot will be underexposed. If you don't want the shot to be underexposed, though, you can combat this by framing your shot first without the sun in view and pressing the shutter release button halfway to lock the exposure. Then you can reframe the shot to include the sun and press the button all the way in.

The other reason you shouldn't shoot into the sun is that you run the risk of flare: random shapes in your photograph caused by the light reflecting off the surfaces of the lens. But sometimes you can cure this by arranging for something in the scene to shield the sun. Alternatively, try shielding the direct sun from the lens using your hand or a piece of card; be careful not to get it in shot. If all else fails, you could try removing the flare later using photo-manipulation software.

There may also be a risk that getting the sun in shot will damage a digital camera's charge-coupled device (CCD). We asked a couple of digital camera manufacturers who advised against it. But there was no suggestion that it would invalidate the warranty, so it seems that the risk is small. Your eyes are very sensitive to damage by sunlight, though, so if you decide to frame a shot that contains the sun, you should use the camera's LCD panel rather than the optical viewfinder. **CS**

DOUBLE YOUR FUN: BREAKING TWO RULES



These two pictures show how a photograph can be improved by breaking the rules. Capturing a sunset inevitably means shooting into the sun, but with the sun low in the sky and often obscured by clouds this is far less of a problem than it would be at mid-day. The first shot was exposed normally and shows the scene pretty much as it



looked. Finding some interesting foreground was an obvious way to improve it, but that alone wouldn't have made a stunning photograph. We decided to break the rule of correct exposure too; by underexposing the shot by a couple of stops, a more atmospheric result was achieved.